

CORPORATE  
INVOLVEMENT  
IN EDUCATION

AMERICA READS CHALLENGE

# reading independence

“All students will read  
independently and well by  
the end of the 3rd grade.”

The Seven Priorities of the U.S. Department of Education

## CORPORATE INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION

Reading is the foundation of all other skills essential for learning. Unfortunately, the National Assessment of Educational Progress reports that 68 percent of fourth graders in high-poverty schools and 38 percent of fourth-graders overall read below the Basic achievement level. Clearly, a significant number of children are not reaching their reading potential. Reading well by the third grade is the essential first step toward reaching challenging academic standards in all subjects.

To succeed in the new global economy businesses need highly skilled and well-educated workers. That is why it is critical that all children master reading, the most fundamental skill, and achieve academic success. By investing today in early childhood literacy programs, businesses are investing in their own long-term success.

# reading

## AMERICA READS

Businesses can participate in many ways in the America Reads Challenge, a national grassroots campaign challenging every American to help our children learn to read. This initiative recognizes the critical importance of an early and successful start in language development and is designed to act as a catalyst for community involvement in promoting reading achievement. Providing children with the appropriate language development experiences in the early years, sets the stage for reading success in later years.

Ensuring that children learn to read well rests not only in the hands of parents, caregivers and teachers, but entire communities as well. By rallying around our children to assist them in learning to read, we help ensure their overall success. Educators, librarians, college students, and community volunteers are joining with private sector partners from many different industries ranging from small businesses to multinational corporations. This ground swell of support is reshaping our view of the reading challenge. Every parent, caregiver, teacher and citizen has a crucial role to play to spark dramatic improvement in reading.

"We must work together to give children the individual attention and support they need to master reading early so that they can then succeed in school and beyond."

U.S. Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley

## Examples of Businesses Supporting Reading Programs

### Reading Challenge

Businesses with an interest in supporting reading efforts may consider allowing employees to serve as reading tutors and mentors, and working in partnership with schools and universities to provide support to children for developing their reading skills.

The America Reads Challenge stresses the importance of communities coming together to ensure that all children read well. In order to promote this critical effort America Reads offers:

- Free resources for businesses, parents, childcare providers, educators, tutors, community groups, and all corporate citizens;
- Guidance and checklists on what businesses can do, and activities for adults to keep children reading after school and during the summer; and
- Access to an extensive network of potential partners and a body of research to help a business start, improve, or contribute to a literacy program.

Businesses may also play a role in literacy by:

- Helping create or expand tutoring programs for children and families in cooperation with local colleges and universities. This can involve providing space in your office building for the program's operations, providing transportation for children and/or tutors, funding supplies or tutor training, and encouraging your employees to volunteer as tutors.
- Providing opportunities for employees to learn more about helping their own children with language development and reading skills by holding brown-bag seminars, distributing free activity materials, and providing literacy training for employees needing to improve their own literacy skills.
- Supplying books, videos, consultants, and other resources to child care centers, community organizations, and schools; and rebuilding or refurbishing school libraries so that they become the center of the school's literacy activities.
- Helping to build coalitions to coordinate literacy efforts in the private sector and establishing relationships with local schools to determine where your help is needed most.

The Los Angeles Times, followed the lead of its sister paper, The Baltimore Sun, and launched its five-year Reading by 9 campaign that seeks to help 1 million children in the five-county area of greater Los Angeles achieve grade-level reading. The Times' commitment will involve virtually every division of the company, as well as local community, business and civic groups, media partners, and literacy groups. In partnership with the U.S. Department of Education, the Los Angeles Times is publishing hundreds of thousands of copies of The Compact for Reading, a guide and activity kit to link families and schools to improve student reading gains. During the 1999-2000 school year, the campaign will donate 1 million new books to kindergarten through third-grade classrooms as well as launch a broadcast and print public service campaign promoting the importance of reading.

From Connecticut to Florida, First Union employees are fond of reading to young children. Reading First is a program that calls for employee volunteers to read aloud once a week to groups of 4-, 5-, and 6-year-old children and donate books to the classroom. The program is research-based and emphasizes that the combination of high-quality books, interactive read-aloud sessions, parent education and teacher training leads to substantial gains in student achievement. During the 1998-1999 school year, First Union employee volunteers spent 13,000 hours reading to 10,750 young children in nearly 430 classrooms from Connecticut to Florida. Since the program's inception in 1997 more than 14,000 books have been donated to schools. To further encourage literacy activities, First Union formed a different partnership and created "Raise a Reader," a free parent-education kit designed to help employees encourage their young children to read.

Pizza Hut's BOOK IT! National Reading Incentive Program seeks to motivate children from kindergarten through sixth grade to read more often. The company developed a tool kit for parents and children to use during the summer months that includes an activity booklet, a reading and vocabulary log, certificates of achievement for adult and child partners, and two bookmarks to help reward and encourage children's reading accomplishments. Continuing to foster children's lifelong love of learning was Pizza Hut's initial goal and after a successful summer program, Pizza Hut expanded it to reach out to more parents, teachers, and schools all year long.

# "Better Education Is Everybody's Business"

Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley

If you are interested in learning how  
your business can be more involved  
with reading programs, please contact  
the Corporate Outreach Office at  
(202) 205-8599, or visit our Web site:  
[www.ed.gov/OIIA/OIA](http://www.ed.gov/OIIA/OIA).



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